



**Maroon Bells – Snowmass Wilderness
Overnight Visitor Use Management Plan
Draft Decision**

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Q. What is the draft Decision on the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness Overnight Visitor Use Management Plan?

- A. The Deciding Official has decided to implement Alternative 2 of the Environmental Assessment, the proposed action, which implements the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Overnight Visitor Use Management Plan (Plan). The Forest has opted for a phased approach starting with phase 1; the Conundrum Hot Springs Zone and the Conundrum Creek Zone (Conundrum Creek trail corridor). The Forest will begin by implementing a reservation system for a limited entry overnight permit, which is expected to be in place by summer season 2018, pending objections and technical feasibility.

Q. Why is the Decision “draft” and not final?

- A. The release of this draft Decision initiates the 45-day objections period. Individuals who submitted timely and specific written comments during the scoping period (initiated Nov. 3, 2016) and/or the comment period (initiated March 29, 2017) will have eligibility to file an objection to the draft Decision Notice under 36 CFR 218. Objections must be submitted within 45 calendar days following the publication of a legal notice in the Glenwood Springs Post Independent. The legal notice is anticipated to be published June 29, 2017. The publication date in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an objection. Those wishing to object should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source. The regulations prohibit extending the time to file an objection.

Q. Why is the Conundrum Creek Zone being included in the initial phase of implementation when it is currently not exceeding capacity thresholds?

- A. The Conundrum Creek Zone was not originally one of the 5 zones shown in the EA to have exceeded capacity; however, it is anticipated that due to the implementation of a limited entry overnight permit system in the adjacent Conundrum Hot Springs Zone (the zone directly south), some overnight campers will be displaced to the Conundrum Creek zone and cause negative impacts to resources. Conundrum Creek Zone is the main access point/travel corridor to Conundrum Hot Springs.

Q. When and how will the Forest address the other four zones which were shown to be exceeding capacity thresholds in the Environmental Analysis?

- A. Phase 2 of the planned implementation will be for the Four Pass Loop, which will include Crater Lake, Maroon Lake, Snowmass Lake, North Fork and East Fork and Upper Snowmass zones. Implementation for the Four Pass Loop reservation system is expected to occur sometime after the Conundrum implementation. Phase 3 implementation will be for Capital Lake and Lower Capital zones.



Q. The draft Decision authorizes the implementation of limited entry overnight permit system in the zones exceeding capacity. How will people get the overnight permit to visit Wilderness?

A. The Forest is still working out implementation details of a reservation system for a limited entry overnight camping permit. One option is utilizing the Recreation.gov service, which is an online tool that handles much of the reservations for the White River's current campgrounds. While this is one option the Forest is considering, Recreation.gov is currently undergoing a service contract change and renegotiation which could impact the White River's implementation timeline.

Q. Will the Plan implement an overnight permit system? Will there be a fee?

A. Yes, the plan proposes an overnight permit system for zones that exceed overnight Groups At One Time (GAOT) capacity as well as certain travel corridors where data indicates they will likely be impacted once use in adjacent zones is limited. A permit system could be applied in the future to other zones if and when they exceed their prescribed capacity. The approximate price for a reservation for one person through the Recreation.gov system is currently \$10. Fees are per reservation, not per night. Groups of up to 10 can be under a single reservation.

Q. Does the \$10 go back to the Forest to pay for services like trail restoration and maintenance, campsite rehabilitation and Wilderness Rangers?

A. No. The \$10 is a service fee that goes to Recreation.gov to pay for processing and administration of the website. The Forest will be looking into options for providing additional resources that could include a fee under the Federal Land Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA). A separate public process is required for new or increased Federal Land Recreation Enhancement Act fees. A fee under this Act would guarantee a funding stream to provide enhanced management needs at the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness into the future.

Full implementation of the Plan will require additional resources to help cover the higher costs for providing specialized services and management in the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness area that is currently not available. Resources are needed to protect the natural resources and environmentally sensitive areas. Enhanced management and specialized services include trail, campsite and area restoration and reclamation, resource protection, wilderness rangers, special wildlife protection measures, enhanced interpretive services, cleanup and removal of trash and human waste, volunteer programs, area-specific environmental monitoring and mitigation, special efforts to manage visitor use.

Q. Did the Plan and Environmental Analysis change based on public input received during the last comment period?

A. No substantial changes were made. Most comments were in support of providing enhanced management actions aimed at reducing natural resource impacts resulting from overnight use. However, small refinements and clarifications to the Plan were made to address issues related to displacement of visitors, dogs, human waste, and human impacts in general. This includes adding the Conundrum Creek Zone to the first implementation phase due to an anticipated displacement of visitors from the Conundrum Hot Springs Zone that will likely cause the Conundrum Creek Zone to exceed capacity thresholds.

Q. What are the next steps?

A. The Forest will conduct an extensive outreach effort with the public and partners when the details for the limited entry overnight permit system are finalized, pending objections.



Q. Why do we need a Visitor Use Management Plan?

A. The Plan will provide management direction for overnight camping which will adaptively address increasing natural resource degradation within the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness. The Plan will enable managers to be flexible and assess specific areas within the Wilderness and address resource concerns with appropriate management actions. The Plan seeks to balance the preservation of natural conditions by addressing biophysical impacts resulting from overnight use, while continuing to provide opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation opportunities.

Q. What kind of degradation is happening in the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness?

A. Increasing overnight visitor use within the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness has been documented as a management concern since 1986. Within certain locations (*Conundrum Hot Springs, Crater Lake and the 4 Pass Loop*) and high use travel corridors, use has increased up to 285% from 2006 to 2015. Degradation to the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness physical resource includes disturbance of wildlife, habituated wildlife to human trash and campsites, illegal tree cutting coupled with fire scars, trash, human waste, campsite hardening and proliferation. Additionally, there are social impacts occurring on the landscape like impacts to opportunities for solitude, lack of Wilderness and camping ethics, crowding, noise and overcrowding in parking areas and increased need for emergency closures.

Q. How long has the Forest Service been monitoring the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness?

A. Increasing visitor use within the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness has been documented as a management concern since the 1986 White River National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan and was addressed in the 2002 Land and Resource Management Plan revision. The Forest has been monitoring and collecting wilderness data for decades. Wilderness data has been obtained through campsite inventories, required overnight registrations, and through wilderness ranger patrol logs.

Q. Does the Plan apply to day use of the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness?

A. No. This Plan will only address overnight use of the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness. While this Plan does not specifically address or propose management direction for day use, monitoring data can be used to help inform future planning decisions and analysis related to day use social, physical and administrative issues and concerns that are not included in this Plan.

Q. Does the Plan apply to the whole Wilderness area or just specific areas?

A. This Plan does not apply to other Wilderness areas on the White River National Forest or within Colorado. This Plan only applies to the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness in its entirety. However, within in the Plan, the Wilderness has been divided into zones based on visitor patterns and trends as well as landscape features. Some management actions may take place in some zones and not in others. Appropriate management actions are implemented based on capacity threshold indicators; if overnight capacity is being exceeded in a zone, a management action may be taken.



Q. What is adaptive management and how is it being used in the context of this proposal?

A. Adaptive management focuses on learning and adapting, through partnerships of managers, and other stakeholders who learn together how to create and maintain sustainable resource systems. In the context of this Plan, an adaptive strategy defines desired conditions with indicators and threshold standards. When thresholds are exceeded for an indicator, management actions are triggered to achieve compliance. These triggered actions are phased in so that the least intensive intervention that achieves the desired conditions is utilized (minimum tool concept). The adaptive management strategy will allow for long-term monitoring of physical displacement and implement a permit system if the capacity is exceeded for any zone in Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness.

Q. What is the ultimate goal of the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness Overnight Visitor Use Management Plan?

A. The Plan will provide long-term direction and flexibility in management focused on reducing biophysical impacts from overnight visitor use in accordance with the Wilderness Act and the White River and Gunnison National Forests, Land and Resource Management Plans (LRMP's), thereby preserving wilderness character of the Maroon Bells- Snowmass Wilderness by sustaining its natural and undeveloped qualities.

Q. How will the Forest Service enforce this plan?

A. The Forest Service will work with wilderness rangers, volunteers and partner organizations to implement the Plan as well as Forest Service Law Enforcement, Forest Service Protection Officers. The forest will also continue to provide wilderness and environmental interpretation, education and visitor services regarding natural resource issues and stewardship ethics.

Q. What benefit would this plan provide to the recreational experience?

A. Having the ability to address these biophysical concerns, would improve both the biophysical environment (natural and undeveloped) and social qualities within the Maroon Bells- Snowmass Wilderness. This would enhance opportunities for high quality wilderness experiences for future visitors. Specifically the Plan would provide managers long-term tools to directly address crowding and resource degradation occurring on the landscape from overnight camping, including human waste, illegal fires, wildlife habituation and illegal camping.

